

# Businesses Respond to Domestic Violence

*by Ellen Ridley-Hooper*

THE DISTRAUGHT EMPLOYEE HURRIED ACROSS THE SALES floor, looking for the store's manager as she walked. A victim of domestic violence, she had just received a threatening phone call and needed to make some quick decisions. But like many abuse victims, she was mentally measuring the cost of revealing her situation to her supervisors. Would her job be compromised if they now understood why she had missed so many shifts?

The store manager responded well despite the employee's fears. He listened to her privately, supported her, and told her not to worry about her job. Most importantly, he asked a key question. "Will you be personally safe when you leave here today?" If the employee's answer had been 'no,' he had the local domestic violence hotline number at his fingertips so she could leave the store with a safety plan in place.

Used with the worker's permission, this real-life scenario was successful. The company, Shaw's Supermarkets, had recently completed detailed domestic violence trainings for all management staff in one market area. The education campaign, called "Part of the Solution" produced immediate benefits.

As Shaw's discovered, it pays to understand domestic abuse in the lives of employees. Ruth Bramson, Senior Vice President for the supermarket chain recently noted, "While domestic violence begins in the home, it is usually not contained there."

Indeed, the effects of this crime on victims result in enormous business losses due to missed work, increased health care costs, and training dollars spent on replacing workers who are fired or forced to quit. In some cases, employers may face serious legal liability if they fail to

respond to a workplace threat and injury to a worker results. Jury awards for inadequate security suits average over one million dollars nationwide.

Governor Angus King recognizes the serious implications domestic violence has for Maine workers and Maine businesses. As a strong supporter of the Maine Employers Against Domestic Violence (MEADV) initiative, he has

invited business leaders across the state to join this effort. Jointly sponsored by the Department of Labor and the family violence projects of the Maine Coalition to End Domestic Violence, the movement is gaining ground.

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Across the state, major employers such as Time Warner, Central Maine Medical Center, Shaw's, and People's Heritage Bank have signed on to the business leadership team.

The concept is simple: create a response to domestic violence that is as comprehensive and carefully crafted as for any other serious workplace safety issue. This means drafting a human resource policy specific to domestic violence, and designing a security protocol sensitive to the reality of abuse.

In addition, employers must implement training for key personnel, understand Maine laws concerning victims' rights, and work collaboratively with unions when appropriate. The overall effect of such planning should be a workplace culture that encourages victims of family violence—female or male—to come forward and access critical community resources such as those provided by the domestic violence projects of the Maine Coalition to End Domestic Violence.

SafetyWorks!, in collaboration with the Maine Safety Council, is offering several domestic violence training classes through the MEADV initiative. For more information, call SafetyWorks! at 1-877-SAFE-345 or find the schedule of classes at <http://www.state.me.us/labor/blsmain> (click on "Safety and Health Classes").

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## In Memoriam



**We remember the many people who died and were injured while working on September 11, 2001. May they rest in peace.**

## Domestic Violence IS a workplace safety issue!

OSHA's standard for emergency plans — 29 CFR 1910.38 — states "The emergency action plan...shall cover those designated actions employers and employees must take to ensure employee safety from fire **and other emergencies**. The General Duty Clause of the Occupational Safety and Health Act requires employers to provide a safe workplace, free from hazards that can cause serious harm.



**From  
SafetyWorks!  
this fall**

If you haven't received your schedule of SafetyWorks! classes, call us at 877-SAFE-345 or visit our web site: <http://www.state.me.us/labor/blsmain.htm> (click on Safety and Health Classes).

### **New topics:**

- The Workplace Responds to Domestic Violence (offered in collaboration with the Maine Safety Council and Maine Employers Against Domestic Violence)
- Child Labor Laws
- Hazard Communication Programs

Plus many other popular safety topics

**Classes fill up quick, so sign up soon.**

## Scott Van Patten Helped with NYC Rescue

SafetyWorks! Occupational Safety Engineer Scott Van Patten traveled to New York City the weekend after the disaster to volunteer in the rescue effort. "It was hard to absorb the enormity of it all...As we were getting closer, there was more debris." Commenting on the work of the volunteers and rescue workers, Scott said, "It was unbelievable seeing everyone working together. It was such a catastrophe, but people are helping out."

Visit our web site at <http://www.state.me.us/labor/blsmain.htm>

## Notes from the Field

### Changes to OSHA Recordkeeping Rules Take Effect January 2002

After many years of consideration, all but a few of the provisions of OSHA's new recordkeeping rules will go into effect in January 2002. The requirements for hearing loss and musculoskeletal disorders are under review and will not take effect until January 2003, at the earliest.

According to OSHA, the new rule increases employee involvement, creates simpler forms and gives employers more flexibility to use computers to meet OSHA regulatory requirements.

SafetyWorks! will offer classes on the new recordkeeping rules starting in December. For more information on the new rule go to OSHA's web page: [www.osha.gov](http://www.osha.gov).

## Check your fire extinguisher know-how

1. **What should you do first if a fire occurs in your work area?**
  - A. Spray the fire with water
  - B. Immediately use the correct fire extinguisher
  - C. Assess the situation and sound the alarm
2. **All Fires can be extinguished with water.**  
True  
False
3. **Class A fires involve**
  - A. Live electrical equipment
  - B. Flammable liquids and grease
  - C. Wood, cloth, paper, rubber, and many plastics
4. **Class B fires involve**
  - A. Live electrical equipment
  - B. Flammable liquids and grease
  - C. Wood, cloth, paper, rubber, and many plastics
5. **Class C fires involve**
  - A. Live electrical equipment
  - B. Flammable liquids and grease
  - C. Wood, cloth, paper, rubber, and many plastics
6. **Extinguishers that have multiple ratings — AB, BC, ABC — can be used to suppress more than one class of fire.**  
True  
False
7. **The steps of the PASS technique are...**
  - A. Point, Aim, Shoot, and Stop
  - B. Pull, Aim, Squeeze, and Sweep
  - C. Pull, Assess, Squeeze, and Sweep
8. **A small fire can flare into a larger blaze with little or no warning.**  
True  
False
9. **If the alarm sounds, immediately evacuate the premises if...**
  - A. You don't know what extinguisher to use
  - B. You don't know how to operate the extinguisher at that location
  - C. The fire is spreading or producing smoke
  - D. All of the above
10. **A portable fire extinguisher is an acceptable substitute for the skills of a professional firefighter.**  
True  
False

ANSWERS: 1.C; 2.F; 3.C; 4.B; 5.A; 6.T; 7.B; 8.

9.D; 10.F

## Fewer Workplace Fatalities in 2000

Twenty-six workers in Maine died from work-related injuries in 2000, down from 32 in 1999.

As in past years, transportation accidents, which includes water vehicles, was the largest single cause of worker deaths. Commercial fishing was the industry with the largest number of fatalities. In 2000, eight Maine workers died when their boats capsized.

Newsletter articles are written by individual authors and are not necessarily products of the Maine Department of Labor or its staff. Information in the articles is not a substitute for official policy or regulations. The editor is Lynne Lamstein, director of outreach and education for the Bureau of Labor Standards. Tel: 207-624-6400, TTY (for deaf and hard of hearing): 800-794-1110, e-mail: [webmaster\\_bls@state.me.us](mailto:webmaster_bls@state.me.us)

The Maine Department of Labor provides equal opportunity employment and programs. Auxiliary aids and services are available upon request to individuals with disabilities.

Visit our web site at <http://www.state.me.us/labor/blsmain.htm>

*Summer/Fall 2001*

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FROM THE DIRECTOR

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**W**ith this issue the SafetyWorks! newsletter introduces our readers to domestic violence as a major safety and health concern. We encourage every Maine employer to recognize domestic violence as a serious and preventable hazard, like the thousands of other workplace safety and health issues that affect businesses and employees.

Why should employers care about domestic violence? Domestic violence leads to absenteeism, increased health care costs, higher turnover and lower productivity at work.

Why is domestic violence a workplace safety issue?

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Employers must provide employees a safe place to work. Victims of violence may be especially vulnerable while they are at work, and other employees can also be at risk.

What can you do? Make domestic violence a part of your business emergency plan. Commit to providing a workplace free of threats, fear and violence. Create a domestic response plan. Most of all educate yourself, managers, and staff about domestic violence, or to counsel concerned employees.

I'm not asking you to become experts on domestic violence, or to counsel concerned employees. I am asking you to look at your organization, develop a plan, and know how to respond when an employee needs help.



Michael V. Frett, Director  
Bureau of Labor Standards